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RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2508  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 000443

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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICAWATCHERS

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [CD](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: CHAD: GOVERNMENT TROOPS TAKE ON REBELS

REF: PARIS 1843

[11.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY. Chadian armed forces, led by President Deby, moved against a Zaghawa rebel group on Chad's eastern border on March 20-21. Both sides claimed victory and it is doubtful that Government of Chad (GOC) action dealt a death blow to the rebels. Deby has bolstered his image -- but his gains may be shortlived. End summary.

[12.](#) (SBU) The Chadian army moved against a rebel group on the border with Sudan on March 20-21 in an extensively publicized and widely anticipated offensive. President Deby himself was flown into Abeche and Farchana by the French during the earlier part of the week. A clash north of Adre in Hadjer Marfain (Hyena Mountains) has been reported by the government. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sources informed Misoff that they believed there had been a second clash south of Adre in Kongo Haraze. The press has also reported that GOC attackers either transited or used Sudanese territory. UNHCR confirmed government reports that SCUD (Zaghawa rebel group) wounded were being taken to the Sudanese town of El-Geneina. Some ten wounded Chadian soldiers had been taken to Abeche, and then flown to N'djamena for further treatment. Although UN officials in Adre reported to headquarters that they had seen no wounded in Adre itself, Air-Serv crew told EconOff that they had seen wounded being brought to Adre. UNHCR told Misoff that SCUD commander Raqi Ramadan was being reported as killed. On the GOC side, we learned through military sources that four U.S. Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI)-trained soldiers were killed in the action.

[13.](#) (SBU) With both sides claiming victory, it may still be too early to say whether the government action decisively took SCUD troops based at Hadjer Marfain out of action. The GOC organized a trip for journalists to Farchana to show the spoils of victory (similar to a trip organized after the GOC counter-assault in Adre in December). However, UNHCR sources believed that significant numbers of Chadian rebel forces still remain across the border in the Suleq Arafa area of Sudan.

[14.](#) (U) UNHCR reported that throughout the week all was calm in the refugee camps on the eastern front. The UN security posture remains unchanged. In Adre, the town closest to the reported action, citizens were aware of activities taking place some 40 kilometers north, but the town itself was not

affected and no shooting was heard. French soldiers were reported to be on standby in Farchana.

¶5. (SBU) UNHCR also informed Missoff that recruitment of Sudanese refugee youths appears to be taking place inside refugee camps, most likely by Government of Chad forces. They believe that some 400 were recruited from Gaga camp, based on reports from NGO's that are missing staff and from family members. The fact that gendarmes and local officials are claiming ignorance would seem to validate that the recruitment was by the GOC rather than by Sudanese liberation movements.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Deby's offensive is no doubt meant to be a show of strength aimed at boosting his position in the run-up to the May 3 elections and convincing wavering supporters that he is still in command. Others here are not convinced that will be the result. They believe, even if Deby did come out on top in this battle, it will be a pyrrhic victory, leaving him weakened in the contest to come with forces grouped under Mahamat Nur and his other enemies. His move against the SCUD, the rebel group drawn predominantly from his own Zaghawa clan, threatens to unleash the long-feared blood feud with the family. Moreover, the non-Zaghawas fighting with him appear to be doing so as a way of getting back at other Zaghawa. The more Zaghawa they can take out now, their thinking seems to be, the stronger their hand will be when it comes time to settle scores in the post-Deby era. Thus, contrary to what the French seem to believe (reftel), we side with the view that, whatever the short-term appearances, Deby is more likely to emerge weaker, not stronger, from this latest clash in eastern Chad.

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¶7. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.  
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